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ABSTRACT

China's official history maintains that the radical egalitarianism of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) led to economic disaster. This book challenges that view. Drawing on local interviews and records in rural Jimo County, Shandong Province, this study contends that the Cultural Revolution's political convulsions democratized village political culture and spurred the growth of rural education, leading to substantial and rapid economic development. These claims are contentious, the author's perspective as a village child who received an education due to the Cultural Revolution being at odds with that of urban elite scholars, who were attacked during that era. Chapter 1 recounts the relationship between Jimo peasants and the Communist Party during the Civil War and the betrayal of Party promises as communist cadres assumed the traditional autocratic status of rural officials. Chapter 2 describes perpetuation of the rural-urban education gap during the early years of communist power and how the rural educational system served to drain talent from rural areas. Chapters 3-4 describe successes and failures of the collective economic organization and related political empowerment in villages. Chapter 5 documents rural education's massive expansion during the Cultural Revolution, which allowed nearly every Jimo child to attend primary and lower middle school and produced the first cohorts of educated youth to remain in their villages. Chapter 6 documents Jimo's rapid growth of agricultural production and rural industry during the era. Chapter 7 outlines consequences of the reversal of Cultural Revolution reforms, including the collapse of rural education and human services systems that depended on the collective economy and the return of rural illiteracy. (Contains 28 Chinese references, 85 references in English, photographs, and an index.) (SV)

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